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SECURITY COUNCIL
Fifty-first year

Letter dated 23 May 1996 from the Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit herewith a letter dated 23 May 1996, addressed to you by His Excellency Mr. Osman Ertuğ, representative of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (see annex).

I should be grateful if the text of the present letter and its annex would be circulated as a document of the fiftieth session of the General Assembly, under agenda items 55 and 112, and of the Security Council.

(Signed) Hüseyin E. ÇELEM
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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ANNEX

Letter dated 23 May 1996 from Mr. Osman Ertuğ addressed to the Secretary-General

It appears that the Greek Cypriot Mission, in a letter addressed to you by the Greek Cypriot representative at the United Nations (A/50/958-S/1996/352 dated 15 May 1996), repeated the allegations regarding the "sale" of a Byzantine church in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, already published by them as a press release on 13 May 1996. In this connection, I have the honour to draw your attention to the fact that the Greek Cypriot side is blatantly distorting the advertisement published on this subject in the Turkish Cypriot newspaper Cyprus Today on 6 April 1996. I wish to point out that the advertisement refers to a leasehold, not a "sale" as the Greek Cypriot side claims.

The leasing of the Church of Panagia Chrysotrimithiotissa in the village of Edremit in northern Cyprus is part of the efforts of the Government of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus to protect and preserve the artistic and architectural heritage of the land regardless of its cultural origin. This is fully in line with the Charter of Venice drawn up in 1964 and the Amsterdam Declaration issued by the Congress on the European Architectural Heritage in October 1975. The Declaration states, inter alia, that local authorities should afford functions to buildings which, whilst respecting their character, correspond to the needs of contemporary life and thus ensure their survival.

Furthermore, a report specifically prepared on the cultural heritage in both parts of Cyprus in July 1989 by the Committee on Culture and Education of the Council of Europe stated, in its paragraph 5.3 on protection of abandoned property, that it had been general Council of Europe policy for some time to urge reuse of redundant religious buildings. That was reasserted as recently as last May in the Assembly when it adopted resolution 916.

The practice of putting historic buildings to contemporary use, either through leasing or in other ways, is not uncommon on the Greek Cypriot side. A case in point is the Monastery of Archangel Michael, located in the village of Monagri in south Cyprus. The building which was little more than a ruin in 1987, was restored with foreign help and expertise and was turned into an art gallery and an art hostel, in which artists could live and work.

The Chrysotrimithiotissa church in northern Cyprus was restored by the leaseholder in 1992, fully respecting its original character, with the approval and under the strict observation of the Department of Antiquities and Museums of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus and the "Evkaf" (Religious Endowment) in whose possession the property is.

The building is currently being used as an arts and crafts gallery, for exhibitions by local artists and as a place where Shakespeare's plays are read and discussed. It should be stressed that the use of the church and its premises, either by the current or any future leaseholder, is subject to the express written approval of the Evkaf Endowment.

As for the Greek Cypriot claim of ownership of the property, such claims do not take into account the historical background of the Cyprus conflict or the current legal and political realities prevailing in the island. Nor do they take into account the agreed principles of the bi-zonality and bi-communality of a future federal settlement. Since, however, this is among the topics of discussion at the intercommunal talks as part of a comprehensive settlement, I will not enter into polemics with the Greek Cypriot side on this issue. Suffice it to say that the Greek Cypriot propaganda we are witnessing on this subject is clearly a product of the distorted mentality that Cyprus as a whole, both the south and the north, is exclusively Greek!

It was in this chauvinistic mentality that the Greek Cypriots destroyed 109 mosques, shrines and other places of Muslim worship across the island during the ethnic and cultural "cleansing" campaign of the Greek Cypriot side between 1963-1974. Among the casualties of this campaign of destruction was the historic Cami-i Cedit Mosque in the town of Paphos, which was completely razed to the ground and turned into a car park, as also indicated in the aforementioned Council of Europe report.

It is unfortunate that, in spite of its above record and at a time when it should come to the table for the achievement of a just and viable settlement through negotiations, the Greek Cypriot side is immersed in a counterproductive campaign of propaganda, undermining even further the chances for a negotiated settlement. Its well-known allegations on the demographic structure of Cyprus, again repeated in the Greek Cypriot representative's letter, must be viewed in the context of this campaign of deceitful propaganda and mispresentation. Since these allegations have been amply refuted in my successive previous communications, I need not deal with them again in detail. I would merely like to reiterate that it has always been the Greek Cypriot side which attempted to change the bi-communal character of the island by eradicating its Turkish Cypriot element in the previously mentioned campaign of ethnic and cultural cleansing, since 1963.

I should be grateful if this letter could be circulated as a document of the fiftieth session of the General Assembly, under agenda items 55 and 112, and of the Security Council.

(Signed) Osman ERTUĞ
Representative
Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus

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